**[Sandra E. Sears’s Story](http://schizophreniadiaries.com/recovery-stories/sandra-e-sears%e2%80%99s-story/" \o "Permanent Link to Sandra E. Sears’s Story)**

I thought my life was just beginning. I’d finished college a few years earlier, and was working on a research project. Then, symptoms started appearing, and my life came to a standstill. I had to be reminded what to do when I woke up… to brush my teeth, to wash up. The man I was living with at the time started staying home with me, and we both sought help through his employee assistance provider. The psychologist there suggested I go to one of the area hospitals. This was my first of about six psychiatric hospitalizations.

My diagnosis was schizophrenia. After the hospitalization, I continued with therapy and medication. I continued trying to work, but I couldn’t keep a job very long. I tried clerical work, proofreading, waitressing. I even tried substitute teaching (I had gotten a teaching degree as “something to fall back on”) but my illness caused me to treat the students inappropriately.

One of my psychiatrists suggested I try to get a civil service job. At first I was reluctant, because I thought I’d be working with people like me. Eventually, I started working with people with mental retardation. There was a provision in the job that allowed me to take off 12 weeks if I worked 1250 hours. That leave helped considerably, and I kept that job for about 11 years.

I had a very bad day treatment experience in 1998. At the day treatment program in New York, someone committed suicide. I had to leave after that, and I went home to Florida, thinking my life was over. I was cut off from my medication, and I constantly thought about death and dying.

A psychiatric assessment center helped me find a source of medication again. The center also ran a day treatment program. Despite my doubts after my last day treatment, I ended up going there. And even to this day I miss it. It was the best.

This program was great because it was long-term (I stayed from July 1998 to February 1999) and because the people were really caring. I had a car and could drive myself, but the occupational therapist always said to me, “We’ll pick you up.” This was so helpful because I had to be up, showered, and ready for the car at 8:30. It got me out of bed.

The day program was instrumental in me securing a volunteer position at a place that helps find housing for people with special needs, mental illness. I volunteered there for approximately four years. Now I work there part-time. I help people with mental illness find housing, and it’s something I want to do. It’s a far cry from the other jobs I’ve had. I never thought I’d be paid to talk on the phone!

In addition to my work, I volunteer for the Mental Health Association and facilitate a Schizophrenics Anonymous support group. I think being busy and having something to do is important. I still spend some time at home, but I try to get out every day.

When a person is ill, it’s important to have the support of family and friends. I stayed away from my family for 22 years thinking that if I came home, they’d lock me away in an asylum. But to my surprise, they were very supportive. Of course, some are less supportive than others. There are people who say “There’s nothing wrong with you. You’re just spoiled.” But there are always going to be people who don’t accept it. A mental illness isn’t like a physical handicap—you can’t see it.

Drop-in centers are very important places for consumers to go as an alternative to isolating themselves at home. Presently I attend and am active member at three drop-in-centers including 9 Muses Art Center, in Lauderhill, FL; REBELS Drop-in-Center in Hollywood, FL; and the Personal Empowerment Education and Recreation (PEER) Center in Oakland Park, FL. Before leaving New York to help in my recovery I also attended drop-in-centers there.

I used to think I was doomed. I used to talk about how I would prepare for my funeral. Looking back on that now, I feel marvelous. As long as there’s life, there’s hope.

[**The Chosen One**](http://schizophreniadiaries.com/delusional/the-chosen-one/)

I was diagnosed schizophrenic when I was 17, but I did not believe it. For seven years I suffered un-medicated. But my insanity reached its climax in the summer of 2004. I was a pothead, self-medicating. I also had done magic mushrooms a few times as well as a whole slew of other drugs. On July 25 2004 I snapped. I had just watched the movie The Recruit. I decided to apply to work for the C.I.A.. In doing so I had included within a sentence about killing them if they did not hire me. Crazy huh? Well I started freaking out, after all I just threatened to kill the CIA.

For days I couldn’t sleep. I was afraid the feds were gonna come arrest me as an enemy combatant, no habeas corpus thanks to the evil patriot act. I started hearing voices. There were noises in my attic. There was knocking on my front door, with no one there. I saw my shadow at night moving independently of myself like peter pan’s. The tv began talking to me. The radio was playing songs just for me, everything threatening me. I heard people talking about me over a walkie talkie I had. I was watching The Matrix over and over again, as well as X-men 2. I was convinced I was the one, like Neo, like anakin skywalker. A superhuman mutant who could speak to the dead.

One night my tv convinced me that I was to meet with my CIA recruiter finally. I wandered around for hours expecting to meet with Donald Rumsfield. I was walking around in a thick forest with no flash light. I wasn’t sure if he was going to kill me or not. I went back home. Consulted my talking television one more time. This time it told me exactly where to go. I made a run for it. I remember throwing up as I walked to this strangers house. When I reached the rendezvous point the street lamp began flickering on and off rapidly. Then this man across the street lit off some illegal fireworks with a strobe flash too. Bingo, this stranger, this man, was my CIA recruiter.

I walked up to him and joked about the illegal fireworks and he asked me if I was a cop. I joked again that I was indeed a cop winking at him knowingly. He asked to see my badge. Not having one I pulled a 25 cent piece out of my pocket as my badge. He freaked out and told me to get the bleep off his property. I thought he was just testing me. So I refused. He grabbed a baseball bat and once again demanded I leave his property. I stood firm winking at him the whole time. He called the cops

They showed up in force, pointing guns at me. I was arrested for criminal trespass and impersonating a cop. I still was convinced that this was all a test, like in the recruit when they put him in jail to try and break him. Jail, just part of the initiation process to make sure I could keep my mouth shut. And keep my mouth shut is what i did. I didn’t say a word to the cops. I didn’t even speak when they booked me. I was totally non-compliant. I was thrown in a isolation cell for 7 days. It was hell. I refused to go with the program. I was convinced I was the chosen one, after all the voices in jail were telling me that. I believed I was the Manchurian candidate. That I was a robot built by the Chinese, that it was really the year 2500. I was to be the leader of the army of the dead to destroy George W. Bush for his wicked ways. And bring peace to the galaxy. ha ha. I was terrified I thought now that the CIA was evil and were trying to infiltrate the jail and assassinate me, before I could assassinate you know who.

To make a long story short they broke me. I hadn’t slept in almost 10 days. I took the anti-psychotics offered me and was released into a mental hospital where I was there for 3 weeks. It took me a long time to come back down to reality. If anyone is curious what schizophrenia is like just watch the movie EAGLE EYE. That’s what they did to me. Once they choose you, they control you! Thank god in my case that it was all in my head. Thank god for anti-psychotics. I could not live without Seroquel.

[**I lived in total fear**](http://schizophreniadiaries.com/recovery-stories/i-lived-in-total-fear/)

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In my teenage years and early 20’s I used drugs quite frequently. Then I was diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia in 2004. For the first four years, It was absolutely terrifying. The Voices were the worst part, praising me one minute then degrading me the next. Then the ideas of reference. I couldn’t read a book, or watch TV, or listen to music without hearing some message specifically meant for me. Every conceivable situation resulted in me being set up for murder, or killed, or at the centre of some vast conspiracy, or the subject of some bizarre experiment. I lived in total fear. There just seemed to be no escape from this paranoid World. I still used Cannabis and was in denial about my illness until 2007. Now, in 2009, things are better. I have stabilised on risperdal, the voices are distant and mostly inaudible, and sometimes I can even indulge in Media without being too affected. I don’t take any drugs other than the prescribed ones. I turned 30 last year, I was 24 when I was  
diagnosed, and feel I have lost some years to this illness. But I have started back at university, and live on my own in the city on a pension. It is still hard to hold down a job. But I feel that a year or two ago I reached a turning point, where I could continue to live in fear or be brave and see through the delusions, see the reality that was mine to make. I use cognitive exercises, the medication, vitamins ( I have still yet to try Zophitin and liquid white mono-atomic gold powder, though I still might one day) prayer mantras, and when the voices start to crowd around, I concentrate as hard as I can on external sounds, even the hum of a refrigerator if I have to. With me, when I do this, the voices tend to fade away. I have plans for the future, and a full recovery from schizophrenia is part of those plans, though I would never have thought that in the beginning, when I was too full of despair over what I considered the ruination of my life. Positive thinking is a must. I look  
forward to a future of happiness and security, despite having one of the most debilitating mental illness that can be had. I have also been blessed with a very supportive family. The darkest hour is passed. My person applauds my joyous comeback, and my full recovery, I am sure, is only a short time away. The Upward Spiral has begun.